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CONVERGENCE: THE MEETING OF TECHNOLOGY AND ART IN DON DELILLO'S
COSMOPOLIS AND ZERO K

by

JAY SHELAT

Under the Direction of Christopher Kocela, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the roles of art and technology in Don DeLillo's novels *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*. DeLillo's works combine art and technology through their depictions of protagonists whom I characterize as rogue capitalists. In *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer is a rogue capitalist who yearns to escape the world of financial speculation after seeing a horrific event, while in *Zero K*, the rogue capitalist figure, Ross Lockhart, wishes to leave the contemporary era by freezing his body. Both characters become "rogues" because they seek to escape the capitalist environment that has made them, and because they negotiate escape, in part, through the use of art. With this project, I hope to answer two questions: (1) Why does DeLillo use the rogue capitalist to bridge

art and technology in the novels? (2) Using humanist and posthumanist theory, what is uncovered about how the rogue capitalist functions amid art and technology?

INDEX WORDS: Art, Don DeLillo, Humanism, Posthumanism, Rogue capitalism, Technology

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by

JAY SHELAT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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2017

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COSMOPOLIS AND ZERO K

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May 2017

DEDICATION

For my parents. I love you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Theoretical Foundations: Humanism and Transcendence	3
1.3 Theoretical Foundations: Posthumanism	4
1.4 Critical Framework.....	6
1.5 Chapter Outline.....	9
2 ROGUE WON: CAPITALISM AMID TECHNOLOGY AND ART IN COSMOPOLIS	12
3 CAPITAL-TECHNO-ART: CONVERGENCE IN ZERO K.....	35
4 CONCLUSION	55

1 INTRODUCTION

“Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete.” – Matthew Arnold

1.1 Background

In the course of a career that spans almost half a century, Don DeLillo has written sixteen novels, three plays, and a short story collection. His prolific works establish his place at the forefront of contemporary American literature alongside figures such as Toni Morrison and Thomas Pynchon, and DeLillo has “created a reputation in American letters that’s as close to unimpeachable as one can imagine” (Guan, *Vice*). DeLillo’s novels, which garner him the most praise, are subject to considerable scholarly attention for their attempt to depict the contemporary, specifically postmodern, American *zeitgeist*. Subsequently, literary scholars divide the octogenarian’s work into three periods: the early, middle, and late.¹ Henry Veggian states that “DeLillo’s career took an entirely unexpected turn since we entered the new century ... But I would point also to a renewed sense of innovation in DeLillo’s recent fiction, a heightened sense of the beautiful to match the incomparable terrors that were a trademark of his twentieth-century works” (xv). Whereas Veggian addresses thematic shifts in DeLillo’s work, Giaimo suggests that these various periods demonstrate how DeLillo straddles the line between modernism and postmodernism; that is, DeLillo’s novels embody both literary movements. I concur with Veggian that DeLillo’s novels certainly shift in tone in his late period, emphasizing

¹ A defining characteristic in DeLillo’s early period novels is the genre, for each book can be categorized precisely. For example, *Americana* (1971) is a road novel, and *End Zone* (1972) is a campus novel. The early period novels (which also include *Great Jones Street* (1973), *Ratner’s Star* (1975), *Players* (1977), and *Running Dog* (1978) are also distinguished by the fact that DeLillo published them almost annually. Following his Guggenheim Fellowship, however, his output of novels slowed considerably, marking the beginning of his middle period. These novels—*The names* (1982), *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1989), *Mao II* (1991), and *Underworld* (1997) are longer and lauded critically and commercially. After the publication of his magnum opus *Underworld*, DeLillo began his late period, which is characterized by short novels. These novels, though popular, are less critically successful and frequently narrow the scope of their settings to a single space or time frame. To date they include *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010), and *Zero K* (2016).

the passage of time in ways not central to the earlier works. Additionally, I agree with Giaimo that DeLillo's works fail to conform exclusively to postmodern or modern characteristics. Yet while each of DeLillo's literary periods differs in tone and output, similar themes such as capitalism's influence, terrorism, and consumerism appear throughout. In particular, the idea of art and technology functioning as capitalist commodities in contemporary American society pervades DeLillo's novels. From the seemingly camera-infused David Bell from *Americana* (1971) to the cryogenic immortality experiments in *Zero K* (2016), DeLillo's novels underscore how technology shapes contemporary American ideology and how capitalism and a consumer society help fuel it.

This thesis explores the role of art and technology in two of Don DeLillo's twenty-first century novels, *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*. These works combine art and technology through their depictions of protagonists whom I will call, following Jerry Varsava (to whose work I will turn shortly), rogue capitalists. Specifically, in *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer plays the role of a rogue capitalist who yearns to escape the world of financial speculation after seeing a horrific event, while in *Zero K*, the rogue capitalist figure, Ross Lockhart, wishes to leave the contemporary era by freezing his body. Both characters become "rogues" not only because they seek to escape the capitalist environment that has made them, but because they negotiate escape, in part, through the use of art. With this project, I hope to answer two questions. First, why does DeLillo use the rogue capitalist to bridge art and technology in *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*? Second, using humanist and posthumanist theory, what is uncovered about how the rogue capitalist functions amid art and technology? These questions serve as the main lines of inquiry in my chapters, and I will seek to answer them by carefully examining both of DeLillo's novels through the lens of humanist and posthumanist theory.

1.2 Theoretical Foundations: Humanism and Transcendence

Definitions of humanism vary according to different theorists, but for the purposes of this thesis project, Bart Nooteboom's ideas on the subject best complement my examination of transcendence, particularly in *Cosmopolis*. Nooteboom's ideas pertain directly to the individual; he begins his treatise on the subject by stating, "Humanism can be characterized as an attitude of life based on reason, autonomy and self-knowledge of the human individual, recognition of universal human being, mostly on the basis of its own efforts" (1). This idea resonates most clearly with *Cosmopolis*, for in the novel Eric Packer, the protagonist, shifts from embodying a humanist to posthumanist subjectivity as a result of autonomous decisions. In addition, Nooteboom's theory of humanism pertains well to *Cosmopolis*, for he says that "humanistic secular modernity also turns out to be accompanied by *violence*" (1, my emphasis). As I will discuss, Eric Packer's humanist turn incites violence, indicating a particularly intense downward spiral toward irrationality. The individualist humanism that Nooteboom theorizes also relies on "the right to be treated with dignity and to have the opportunity to flourish and be 'authentic'" (3); this notion applies well to *Cosmopolis* for Eric Packer, throughout most of the novel, refuses to treat others with dignity, thereby reinforcing his posthumanist ideology.

A critical aspect of humanist thought that I refer to throughout this thesis is transcendence, which refers to a heightened sense of perception that may reveal a greater truth. In my study of *Cosmopolis*, I employ Nooteboom's definition of transcendence as "something divine or higher than the self that is 'holy,' i.e. [that] cannot be fully grasped and is awesome" (4). I extend Nooteboom's definition by suggesting that quotidian aspects of life—a common emphasis of DeLillo's fiction—provide a vehicle to transcendence. My analysis of humanism and transcendence in *Zero K* aims to show how language and literature provide false ways to

epiphany for Jeffery Lockhart. While the idea of transcendence through written art originates as far back as Plato, I adopt Romantic concepts of transcendence through language and literature; in this regard, Paul Maltby informs my reading of *Zero K* as he, too, uses Romantic figures to assert that DeLillo's characters achieve epiphanies—or, as he calls them, “visionary moments” (258). Although Maltby refers to the writings of William Wordsworth, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Edmund Burke, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ralph Waldo Emerson to establish his argument, I use Samuel Johnson and Percy Shelley's ideas to inform mine. Percy Shelley declares that “language itself is poetry” (2754); in other words, language is an art. This assertion positions the protagonist as an artist when he repeats phrases and names strangers. Jeffery believes that his wont for naming strangers and repeating certain phrases could possibly bestow transcendence. Maltby stresses in his article that DeLillo's novels feature “that familiar Romantic myth of some primal, pre-abstract level of language which is naturally endowed with greater insight, a pristine order of meaning that enables unmediated understanding, community, and spiritual communion with the world around” (265). As we will see in *Zero K*, Jeffery Lockhart believes language holds a potentially transformative power; however, Jeffery fails to achieve any form of substantial transcendence through language. In fact, no one in the novel transcends. Rather, language and technology only provide temporary epiphanies.

1.3 Theoretical Foundations: Posthumanism

Posthumanism contorts the idea of humanism and “introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet” (Braidotti 2). This wing of cultural studies also “enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with *greater* specificity

once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness, reason, reflection, and so on” (Wolfe xxv). Posthumanism allows for a robust understanding of how the world changes and how humans catalyze and embody that change. The concepts about posthumanism relevant to my interpretation of *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K* originate in the work of prominent theorists of posthumanism such as Pramod K. Nayar, Neil Badmington, Carey Wolfe, and Rossi Braidotti. Nayar explains that posthumanism branches off into two concepts: transhumanism and critical posthumanism. Transhumanism sees “the limitations of the human body (biology) as something that might be transcended through technology so that faster, more intelligent, less disease-prone, long-living human bodies might one day exist on Earth” (Nayar 6). Wolfe deems transhumanism “the best-known inheritor of the cyborg strand of posthumanism” (xiii).² In this thesis, I refrain from implementing the transhumanist branch of posthumanist theory, for neither Packer nor Jeffery ever see themselves as cyborgs. Instead, I find that Nayar’s definition of critical posthumanism proves the most helpful to understanding the characters of Packer and Lockhart. Nayar posits that two characteristics define critical posthumanism. First, the human and all other life forms coexist, “sharing ecosystems, life processes, [and] genetic material” (8); second, technology forms an integral part of human identity. I choose to use the second characteristic to interrogate the use of technology in *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K* because these novels focus primarily on the development of the human world. DeLillo argues in both books that the concept of humanity and what it means to be human is changing; thus using a definition of posthumanism that caters more to science fiction would be inappropriate. I wish to examine how technology and the human work in tandem, and Nayar’s study lends itself to that. He states, “Critical posthumanism calls attention to the ways in which

² The “cyborg strand” refers to the popular perception of posthumanism as an explication of humans with cybernetic limbs or laser eyes. This perception stems largely from Donna Haraway’s article “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985).

the machine and the organic body and the human and other life forms are now more or less seamlessly articulated, mutually dependent and co-evolving” (8). In essence, Nayar contends that technology and humanity advance *together*. Both of these 21st century novels question the fate of humanity because of its dependence on technology. In *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer dies in large part because of his detrimental dependence on technology; in *Zero K*, humans, or those who can afford it, use cryogenic technology to freeze themselves, creating a new form of art that fails to provide the transcendence patients like Artis Martineau desire.

In addition to Nayar, Neil Badmington’s definition of posthumanism supports my ideas about *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*. He avows that posthumanism “does not (and, moreover, cannot) mark or make an absolute break from the legacy of humanism” (21). He goes on to suggest that posthuman study and writing is a “critical practice” that is a “working-through of humanist discourse” (22) and stresses the idea that both schools of thought should work together. My examination of Eric Packer and Jeffery Lockhart reinforces the idea that these protagonists are posthuman in terms of their irrationality and that their posthuman activities answer questions about the human world which they inhabit.

1.4 Critical Framework

As mentioned above, the bulk of criticism regarding DeLillo’s work discusses the novels from his middle period of the 1980s and 1990s; however, a plethora of scholarship has also been written about *Cosmopolis*. Randy Laist’s monograph discusses the function of technology in DeLillo’s fiction, and he dedicates a chapter to *Cosmopolis*. Laist argues that Eric Packer shifts from a humanist to a posthumanist subjectivity; but he claims that “the possibility that Eric is a revolutionary humanist at heart is countered and inverted by the posthuman revelation that the protestors and Eric have a deeper bond than ideology” (171). I agree, but I think that a

posthuman reading of Packer needs to be taken further by interrogating the catalysts that incite his shifts in subjectivity. As a result, I differ from Laist in that I focus on art and technology in relation to rogue capitalism which, according to Jerry Varsava, “seeks special advantage and unfair profit” (79). Varsava posits that Packer functions solely in what is the “self sphere,” a place “defined by solipsism and ego where the libertarian credo of self-interest is taken to its logical conclusion” (84). Packer’s egotistical mentality is supported by his need to have and use the most immediate technologies, which serve as “Packer’s means to hegemony” (Varsava 87). Although Varsava studies *Cosmopolis* in his article, his ideas serve my purposes with regard to the rogue capitalist in *Zero K* as well. In both novels, the rogue capitalist bridges the gap between art and technology.

In contrast to *Cosmopolis*, *Zero K*, has received virtually no critical attention yet. In constructing one of the first scholarly analyses of DeLillo’s latest novel, I rely in part on Clara Sarmiento’s implementation of the term “post-human,” to refer to a world that is *past* humans.³ Humans live in this world, but they are no longer dominant. Sarmiento claims that “[i]ndividual as well as collective memory arises from violence, war, and despair in a not merely fictional, post-human urban landscape,” and the inhabitants of this environment are isolated and “create their own rituals, beliefs, and myths” (147). The author uses these ideas in an analysis of Paul Auster’s *In the Country of Last Things* and Don DeLillo’s “The Angel Esmeralda” and *Underworld*; however, many of her ideas are also applicable to *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*. Sarmiento argues that in the urban, post-human worlds that DeLillo creates, “art is one of the consolation prizes people receive for having lived in a difficult and sometimes chaotic world. In art, people seek patterns” (157). Ultimately, Sarmiento writes that “language (and its product,

³ I would like to note the distinction that I use the term *posthuman*; without the hyphen, the term suggests that humanism still lives as society and individuals become more technologically inclined.

literature) is the field in which freedom is deployed” and where “literature is always performing a double mission: to tell stories of bondage *and* freedom in order to make us free” (158, my emphasis) in post-human and secluded worlds.

Although Saramento’s argument is useful to an understanding of the novels on which I will focus in this study, she forgets a key reason why DeLillo’s characters so often need language, which is to establish a sense of continuity through repetition across time. In *Zero K*, Jeffery Lockhart obsesses over the definitions of words, giving names to things or people he does not understand, and subsequently repeats these words, creating a chant. For instance, he repeats the words “sine cosine tangent” in an attempt to remember and help interpret the moment his father left their home forever. It is Jeffery’s repetition that converts language into art in *Zero K*: repeated words become mantras.⁴ By interrogating his father’s actions immediately after he writes trigonometry functions, meaningless words become inextricably sutured to these actions in Jeffery’s mind. A defining moment in his life, his father’s leaving serves as the equation Jeffery uses to understand himself. This scene is important to my thesis because it depicts Jeffery’s use of art (language) to allow for understanding—a kind of humanist realization. In addition, Jeffery uses language as an art form to comprehend the posthuman choices that his father and stepmother make.

I structure this thesis around my central argument that certain modes of art and technology work together to define the figure of the rogue capitalist. While the publication of *Zero K* synthesizes and advances many of the themes that DeLillo presents throughout his earlier works, it especially exemplifies the themes he displays in his post-*Underworld* novels, which

⁴ This idea is prevalent throughout DeLillo’s fiction. For example, in *Underworld*, the phrase “Everything is connected” appears often.

include a focus on quotidian happenings in brief periods of time⁵ and the influence of contemporary, rogue capitalism. This project serves to establish a basis for further scholarship on *Zero K* and aims to revitalize scholarly work on *Cosmopolis*.

1.5 Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this thesis, “Rogue One: Capitalism Amid Technology and Art in *Cosmopolis*,” discusses how Eric Packer vacillates between a humanist and posthumanist subjectivity through his obsession with art and technology. Packer, as a rogue capitalist, is sutured to his posthumanist qualities. Rogue capitalism distances Packer from others and is the root cause of his apathy. Technology serves as Packer’s route to power—a way to control “cyber capital” (DeLillo 79). After witnessing a self-immolating man during a globalization protest, Packer recognizes in part the harmful influences of global, digital capital; as a result, although he cannot fully articulate why he is apathetic, Packer begins to try to empathize with others. Packer *wants* and *tries* to imagine this self-immolating man’s day in an attempt to empathize; however, he fails to do so. He recognizes that he should empathize with the protestor, but he cannot imagine how to do so. As the novel progresses, however, Packer learns to empathize through art’s inherent humanistic qualities of community.

As with technology, art pervades *Cosmopolis*. The way Packer treats art, however, problematizes what he wants from it. In a focal scene, Packer discusses with Didi Fincher the need for the Rothko paintings, which she thinks are “receptive to the mysteries” (30) of Packer’s identity. That is, Didi believes that the Rothko paintings help Packer understand himself. The paintings permit clarity and self-realization, allowing Packer to access his emotions. When his

⁵ In his novels prior to *The Body Artist*, DeLillo certainly focuses on the quotidian aspects of life; however, these aspects are spread across much longer periods of time.

friend Brutha Fez dies and Packer hears rap music playing as the funeral procession inches through the street, the protagonist displays his remorse by crying. The poetry—the rap—reveals Eric’s sentiments and displays his humanistic side and capacity for empathy. Art, therefore, influences Packer’s fluctuating humanist subjectivity, like technology and rogue capitalism do for his posthumanist side. This instability recurs throughout the novel until the end, leaving Packer in a state of suspension between life and death and in a vague position of subjectivity.

In chapter two, “Capital-Techno-Art: Convergence in *Zero K*,” I address the use of art and humanist, rational thought as a combatant to technology in the novel. Capitalism and posthumanism in *Zero K* interact differently than in *Cosmopolis*. Ross Lockhart, in *Zero K*, is a capitalist who works in “global finance” (54); he leaves the world of “material things” (205) and enters the posthuman one when he decides to cryogenically freeze himself. That is, Ross Lockhart’s choice is rooted in his desire to quit his profession. The art, too, used in *Zero K* differs greatly from that in *Cosmopolis*. In the hospital waiting room, where Artis, Jeffery’s step-mother, awaits her procedure, “[t]he only thing that’s not ephemeral is the art. It’s not made for an audience. It’s made simply to be here. It’s here, it’s fixed, it’s part of the foundation, set in stone” (51). As omnipresent as technology is in the world of *Zero K*, art, too, is everywhere. Even people become works of posthuman art to be sold: “Human bodies, saturated with advanced preservatives, serving as mainstays in the art markets of the future” (232). To help him understand the decision his father and step-mother make to cryogenically freeze themselves, Jeffery Lockhart implements an artistic use of language. By creating names and repeating words so that they become mantras, Lockhart transforms language into art. Cryogenics in this novel momentarily suspend the body from the effects of time, and in the future, “[m]ind and body are restored, returned to life” (8) as they once were. To oppose this overtly posthuman path his

family has taken, Jeffery tries to “inject meaning, make the place coherent or at least locate [himself] within the place, to confirm [his] uneasy presence” (10). Yet, art becomes posthuman. As Ross prepares to freeze himself, Jeffery learns “of a developing language system far more expressive and precise than any of the world’s existing forms of discourse” (233). Spoken in “choppy syllablelike units that were interspersed at times with long-drawn breathless episodes of humdrum monotone” (233), this new language enthralls Jeffery because only the people who work at Convergence speak it.

My thesis concludes with a return to the initial two questions I pose. By interrogating the rogue capitalist’s apathy and distance from others, I wish to emphasize his fluctuation between art and technology. The rogue capitalist is used by DeLillo to tie together art and technology, creating a picture of contemporary American society that focuses on the inherent tension between both mediums. Furthermore, by incorporating both mediums in his books, DeLillo calls upon the reader to create a harmony between art and technology. The notion that art and technology should work together helps to interpret the contemporary American moment, and this idea is not myopic. DeLillo seems to warn readers about the importance of finding harmony between both technology and art, and considering the lack of closure in novels like *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*, discovering and articulating that harmony is up to readers.

2 ROGUE WON: CAPITALISM AMID TECHNOLOGY AND ART IN *COSMOPOLIS*

Set in the course of a solitary day in April, 2000, *Cosmopolis* recounts Eric Packer's journey as he makes his way through New York City traffic in his "aggressively and contemptuously" (10) luxurious limousine; ostensibly, the novel details Packer's journey to get a haircut in Hell's Kitchen. Technology-obsessed Packer works as a ruthless global trader whose immense wealth slowly dissipates as the Chinese Yen rises. As Packer rides in his office limo and makes his way to the barber, his many advisors warn him about his impending financial ruin and the impact it will have on the economy. Packer, nevertheless, refuses to adhere to anyone's guidance. The protagonist's obstinance dominates the first half of *Cosmopolis*, reaching a critical apex during an anti-globalization protest. At the protest, Packer witnesses a protestor's self-immolation as a form of resistance; the image of the burning man remains in Packer's mind for the remainder of the book and serves as the impetus for a drastic change in his behavior. As the novel progresses, Packer engages in riskier and more irrational behavior, seemingly, to combat the plummeting value of the U.S. dollar;⁶ however, Packer endangers himself (and others) as an ironic method to connect with others and learn how to empathize. Throughout Packer's moral transformation, though, he struggles to disconnect from his hyper-mediated and technologically driven world and to relinquish his capitalist ideology.

In this chapter, I argue that Eric Packer's subjectivity shifts from posthumanist to humanist, and that he fluctuates between the two because of technology and art; furthermore, I claim that through these vacillations in subjectivity, Eric Packer bridges the divide between art and technology. Eric Packer's rogue capitalist ideology positions him as a powerful figure, and his technology bolsters his dominance. Technology defines Packer's posthumanity and, alongside

⁶ Jerry Varsava brilliantly compares Packer to the Greco-Roman mythological character Icarus, characterizing them as "[v]ainglorious, egocentric, self-indulgent, [and] indifferent to the feelings of others" (101).

the solipsistic nature of rogue capitalism, it hinders him from having a humanist and empathetic relationship with other people. Art ultimately is the humanist entity that creates an empathetic response in the protagonist.⁷ In reading *Cosmopolis* through posthumanist and humanist lenses, we intuit DeLillo's grim warning about the dangers of a cyber-capitalist society: in such a society, technology and capitalist ideology enforce an individualism that restricts meaningful and empathetic relationships.

Up-to-date technology pervades the overtly posthuman world Packer lives in, socially disconnecting the protagonist from other people. This dependence on technology constitutes, in large part, Packer's posthuman subjectivity—so much so, in fact, that Packer perceives himself as comprised of data. Posthumanism “uncover[s] those uncanny moments at which things start to drift ... against itself and the grain” (Badmington 19), and those moments blur the lines between fiction and reality. The most overt instance of this blurring occurs when a doctor performs an echocardiogram on Packer in his limo: “Eric was on his back, with a skewed view of the monitor, and wasn't sure whether he was watching a computerized mapping of his heart or a picture of the thing itself” (44). Eric's *perception*—what he believes to be real—of his heart is mechanized. He muses on this idea: “How dwarfed he felt by his own heart. There it was and it awed him, to see his life beneath his breastbone in *image forming units*” (44, my emphasis). Obviously, his heart is not computerized and made of units, but Packer's perception of it blurs the fiction and the reality. Pramod K. Nayar suggests that seeing the individual self as partly mechanized is normal in a posthuman environment, asserting that “we need to see bodies as networked, hybrids or congeries in which the subjectivity of the individual is constituted through

⁷ The words “art” and “technology” are used broadly in this chapter. The different forms of art I discuss are painting, film, and poetry; the different forms of technology are cars, watches, and screens.

and within the network, or the connection s/he has with machines and tools” (107).⁸ Thus this blurring of fact and fiction accentuates Eric Packer’s posthuman subjectivity.

Another critical posthuman aspect of Eric Packer’s subjectivity stems from his desire for immortality in a technological space: “He’d always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass... The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void.... an evolutionary advance that needed only the practical mapping of the nervous system onto digital memory” (DeLillo 206-207). This “posthumanist desire to download consciousness into a gleaming digital environment” (Badmington 11) is what Randy Boyagoda compellingly calls “a secularized resurrection motif: the twenty-first century American self entering into the limitless, digital heavens of the market” (13) suggesting an inextricable connection between posthuman immortality and the digital world of contemporary capitalism. Vija Kinski, one of Packer’s advisors and someone who is not a digital capitalist (unlike Packer’s other advisors) also theorizes posthuman immortality. She says to Eric: ““I understand none of this.... Microchips so small and powerful. Humans and computers merge. This is well beyond my range. And never-ending life begins”” (105). Although Eric’s response to this is, at first, sexual—he thinks of Kinski “naked on his chest” (105)—his imaginings of her change as she continues to explicate the world in which Packer lives. Suddenly Kinski is “vivid in his nightmares, commenting on events therein” (105). Pleasure transforms into fear, and, finally, after Kinski avers a haunting idea, Packer fails to respond—even physically. Vija says, ““There you sit, of large visions and prideful acts. Why die when you can live on disk? A disk, not a tomb. An idea beyond the body”” (105). Thus the technological immortality that Packer seeks allows for “the resurrection

⁸ Earlier in the text, Nayar declares that “[t]he human is a congeries, a moment in a network” (35) within the posthuman world.

into eternal life that cyber capitalism offers” (Boyagoda 23). Boyagoda claims also that in *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo affirms “how a contemporary manifestation of materialistic narcissism has coupled with technology-driven currency speculation to create a species of consumption that simultaneously inspires and destroys most every attempt at direct human contact” (12). That is, Packer’s engagement in cyber capitalism influences his fluctuation between a posthumanist and humanist subjectivity.

Nevertheless, critical posthuman theory contends that a lone posthuman subject has a more profound understanding of empathy: “a non-unitary [posthuman] subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connectedness between self and others ... by removing the obstacle of self-centered individualism” (Braidotti 49-50). I disagree with Braidotti, however, when considering Packer. Taking into account what critic Jerry Varsava says about rogue capitalism “yield[ing] ... ‘destructive destruction’” (79) and allowing for individual monetary and social gain, Packer is a posthuman subject who is solely culpable for his actions and who is quite literally alone for a significant part of the novel. Of course, his advisors appear, but he disregards their opinions and engages in what John Updike calls “lobotomized ... dialogue” (*The New Yorker*), which presents itself as one-sided and uninterested. Thus in his actions and his conversations, Packer isolates himself. Clara Sarmiento believes lack of empathy forms a recurring trope in DeLillo’s works; she professes that DeLillo has “the ability to create obsessive characters that are unable to understand the world around them” (151).⁹ Packer’s inability to understand others, by extension, hinders his understanding of the community at large and cements his status as posthuman.

⁹ Sarmiento cites *The Names*, *Mao II*, and *Underworld* as having characters who struggle to empathize and comprehend their surroundings. It is interesting to note that the novels that Sarmiento uses in her argument are from Don DeLillo’s middle period.

Furthermore, Packer physically separates himself from others in his car, which “is a character in its own right” (Veggian 89). The protagonist reaches the zenith of his power when he is in his car. Packer’s limousine operates as a medium where technology and capitalism meet, thus serving as an elaborate tool of power. Packer retrofits the interior with “visual display units” and “medleys of data on every screen, all the flowing symbols and alpine charts” and “a heart monitor” (13) to “enhance [the limo’s] functionality as a mobile office and to increase security, and has nothing to do with the driving experience” (Davidson 477). Martina Sciolino deems Packer’s limo “a global center ... through which DeLillo critiques the new world order of global cybercapitalism” (223). While I agree with Sciolino, the limo more clearly serves as a space of immense power. In the limo office, Packer “is devouring the data, taking in numbers in order to turn them into himself, to make more of himself” (Heyne 440). Essentially, the limo reminds Eric of his prowess: “He wanted the car because it was not only oversized ... metastasizingly so, a tremendous mutant thing that stood astride every argument against it” (DeLillo 10). Described like a tumor spreading throughout a body, the limo travels through New York City, while the US dollar and Eric Packer, a symbol for contemporary capitalism, fall to ruin. The limousine, in this regard, fails to operate as a traditional symbol. Davidson says, “The more usual role of the car ... is that of liberation, freeing the driver and passengers from the constraints of time and space, and moving them from the ‘every day’” (473). Indeed, in *Cosmopolis*, the car serves to get Eric through another twenty-four hours and from place-to-place, but it is not liberating or work-free environment; in fact, Packer uses the car as an office throughout the novel, and it is the place where he conducts much of his business. The white limousine—a futuristic “post-car” (Davidson 476)—also behaves as a medical exam room in which Packer learns about his asymmetrical prostate—a condition that scares Packer. Davidson further claims that the car functions to

"[cheat] death and [heighten] awareness of it" (473). Therefore, the inclusion of the hyper-technology inside the car is a way for Eric to stay updated on the latest information and a way to maintain an awareness of death or danger. Packer's bodyguard, Torval, corroborates this idea. When Packer first enters his vehicle early in the day, Torval immediately updates him about the security measures taken to secure the mobile space of threats, allowing Packer to judge how to protect himself and to maintain control over his surroundings. I concur with Randy Laist when he says, "As long as [Eric] remains within the car and under the umbrella of protectedness which it and its onboard security personnel provide, Eric can drift through the city ... without actually entering the scene in any existential way" (162). But I would like to take Laist's analysis of the limo further. That the limo functions dually as an office and global (and mobile) trade center is important: Packer engages in rogue capitalism as he rides in a car designed to distance and protect him from the very streets he traverses for most of the novel.

It is when Eric engages directly with technology that we see his power and yearning for dominance in full view. Varsava postulates that "[t]echnology is Packer's means to hegemony and, at the time, its possession the purest expression of it" (87). Essentially, technology grants Packer power, and he communicates through technology to manage his staff: "[he] spoke a coded phrase to a signal processor in the partition" which "generated a command on one of the dashboard screens" (DeLillo 25). Eric's need for newly updated, faster technology and his craving to know the future attests to his hegemonic views and his insistence on being in power. Packer's longing for immediacy extends to all the technology around him, for he "denigrates antiquated technologies and their collaterally dated markers" (Varsava 86). He believes that ATMs are "anti-futuristic, so cumbrous and mechanical that even the acronym seemed dated"

(DeLillo 54), and as he drives by the bank he wonders “why cash registers were not confined to display cases in a museum of cash registers in Philadelphia or Zurich” (71).

In addition to technology, Eric Packer’s career as a global trader influences his inability to connect with others and his posthumanist subjectivity. Rogue capitalism explains Packer’s harsh treatment of, and opinions toward, others. Jerry Varsava elucidates the fundamentals of rogue capitalism, stating that it is “that subspecies of capitalism that seeks special advantage and unfair profit” (79). He goes on to posit that “[g]reed, social prestige and often obscure forms of psycho-emotional gratification serve as catalysts for misconduct of the rogue capitalist,” allowing for destruction of society’s greatest asset: community and societal harmony. Because the rogue capitalist, in a sense, distances himself from society and his specific community, we can safely call him individualistic, greedy, and, most importantly for this project, someone who lacks empathy and consideration for others. Furthermore, Eric Packer works within the realm of cybercapitalism, or with “[t]he interaction between technology and capital. The inseparability” (DeLillo 23). Therefore, in its inherent connection to cyber capitalism, I claim that Packer’s posthumanist subjectivity is heightened by the nature of his ideology and career. Packer’s missing empathy and attention toward others allows for a buttressing of his posthuman subjectivity; this subjectivity is also rooted in his addiction to technology—thereby to his rogue capitalist ideology—which largely determines his personality and decisions.

Packer fully engrosses himself in the global market, resulting in strained and masturbatory relationships with others. The most problematic of these relationships is with his wife, Elise. The unromantic newlyweds struggle to converse, and when they do speak, the conversation creates tension. Elise and Eric’s breakfast together early in *Cosmopolis* embodies their relationship. After Elise divulges a secret about her writing process and serious psychological damages from a

challenging relationship with her mother, Eric objectifies his mother-in-law. He says, ““I like your mother. You have your mother’s breasts...Great standup tits”” (18). Through Eric’s interactions with Elise, we see the rogue capitalist’s absence of empathy for or awareness of his immediate community. Another example of Packer’s disconnection from others, especially from women, takes place after he and Jane Melman masturbate and climax together. In a post-climax moment of sensitivity, Jane says to Packer before she leaves the car, “I am advising you in this matter not only as your chief of finance but as a woman who would still be married to her husbands if they had looked at her the way you have looked at me here today” (54). Packer, however, fails to respond to Melman’s emotional confession: “He was not looking at her now” (54). When Packer eschews Melman’s sentimentality in this taciturn manner, he confirms his inability to relate to his immediate community. This also shines a light on Packer as a rogue capitalist. As someone unable to connect with his community, he “violates ... the ethical-social conditions necessary for [a] orderly and just society” (Varsava 29). Thus, socially and ethically, Packer deconstructs the humanistic qualities—harmony and empathy— of society. This is further exemplified in Packer’s determination and ardent desire for sex.

Packer’s sexual escapades and obsession with his health throughout *Cosmopolis* suggest a corporeal element attached to rogue capitalism that Varsava’s article neglects. Packer’s sexual encounters connote a business deal in their tone; quick and efficient (for Packer), the sexual situations are transactional. When in the jewelry district in New York City, the people Packer sees are so distant that they physically cannot touch each other or look at each other: “A quarter of a second of a shared glance was a violation of agreements that made the city operational. ... No one wanted to be touched. There was a pact of untouchability” (66, my emphasis). Packer is a rogue capitalist who deals with *cybercapital*—technology mediates his business—and to him

physical contact should only be sexual in nature. Sex for Packer reiterates his solipsistic power and control over his body. The first chapter of the novel concludes with a simple sentence that serves as the impetus for much of Packer's behavior in the novel, for it terrifies him, as mentioned above. Before the associate doctor, Ingram, leaves Packer's office-limo, he says, "'Your prostate is asymmetrical'" (54).¹⁰ Bart Nooteboom posits that "[t]he fear of death and fear of existence and its apparent lack of sense has caused the human being to seek solace and a sense to this puny life beyond the self and its being in the world" (4). In keeping with Nooteboom's theory, Packer reverts to technology and capitalist ideology as coping mechanisms; specifically, he practices rogue capitalism, too, to assert his dominance over others, to exhibit his authority. This power play emotionally distances Packer from others. When he has sex, however, Packer is physically but not emotionally close to his partners: to him sex seems purely masturbatory. He interacts with women only, it seems, to have sex, and post-coital conversations refer back to Packer expressing his machismo or another form of his power. After intercourse, for example, Didi Fancher, his mistress, acknowledges Eric's recent marriage to Elise and the obvious fortune the two create. She says, "'Not so strange. Two great fortunes,' ... 'Like one of the great arranged marriages of old empire Europe.'" (26) Packer responds confidently: "'Except I'm a world citizen with a New York pair of balls.'" Immediately afterward he "[hoists] his genitals in his hand" (26). Grabbing his genitalia reaffirms, for Packer, his manhood and seemingly indestructible power as a man and a capitalist.

Moreover, if Eric represents the rogue capitalist, then Didi denotes the artist,¹¹ and DeLillo juxtaposes these two characters through their discussion of art. In the novel, capitalism and art in

¹⁰ This sentence reoccurs throughout the novel, and the persistent image of the asymmetrical prostate recalls the continuous appearance of the 1951 "Shot Heard 'Round the World" baseball in *Underworld* (1997).

¹¹ Henry Veggian states, "In DeLillo's America there is a business person for every artist" (89). Eric and Didi represent the business person and artist, respectively.

tandem reveal Packer's paucity of compassion. Packer believes he can buy a chapel with Mark Rothko paintings, the Rothko Chapel. Didi must explain to him that art belongs to the world and that while it has monetary value, art has a more important spiritual value that enhances the shared human experience. She tells Packer, as they lie naked in bed, why he should buy a Rothko piece: "It will remind you that you're alive" (30). She continues,

Don't you see yourself in every picture you love? It's something you can't analyze or speak about clearly. What are you doing at that moment? You're looking at a picture on a wall.

That's all. But it makes you feel alive in the world. It tells you yes, you're here. And yes, you have a range of being that's deeper and sweeter than you know. (30)

Didi empathetically explains the function of art as allowing us to live in the moment and engage in the global community with a recognition of being "alive in the world." But as a rogue capitalist, Packer "wholly vacates the private sphere, the place where legitimate capitalism is played out" and functions only in the "self sphere" (Varsava 85), seeking only what benefits him. This narcissistic perception of the world hinders Packer from understanding others. The Rothko paintings do not grant Packer a feeling of understanding or empathy; instead, they exhibit one more thing to own for himself. His response to Didi's musing is carnal and selfish: "He made a fist and wedged it between her thighs, turning it slowly back and forth" (30). This crude and forced gesture exemplifies the power Eric exerts throughout the novel through his treatment of women and complete disavowal of compassion.

Art, throughout *Cosmopolis*, stands in a dichotomous relationship to technology. DeLillo includes art during instances of overt posthumanist behavior, yet Packer knows that art holds a power over him like technology does. Sarmento suggests that in DeLillo's works "art is one of the consolation prizes people receive for having lived in a difficult and sometimes chaotic world.

In art, people seek patterns in order to elude natural experiences” (152). For example, when the novel begins, a sleep-deprived Packer uses art, specifically poetry, to put himself to sleep, but the opposite occurs as he “only grew more wakeful.” For Eric, “[p]oems made him conscious of his breathing” (DeLillo 1). Poetry allows the protagonist to understand the ontological, the metaphysics of being: through art, Packer acknowledges his sense of being. Data also does this: “data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process” (24). Therefore, while poetry juxtaposes data in form, they mirror each other in function. DeLillo describes data poetically, claiming that for Packer, both art and technology establish a “dynamic aspect” of life. The scene discussing the Rothko chapel with Didi represents Packer’s capitalistic mentality and lack of concern for other people. Through a humanistic analysis, however, Packer’s need for the Rothko paintings, though individualistic and narcissistic, becomes subjective. He needs the painting to help him understand himself and the world around him. Didi Fancher understands this when she says, ““I think you want this Rothko.... You have something in you that’s receptive to the mysteries”” (30).

The elements of technology, rogue capitalism, and an absence of empathy conjoin in the scenes following the deaths of Packer’s contemporaries and rival global capitalists. When Arthur Rapp is murdered, Eric obsessively watches replays on the television in his limo: “Eric wanted them to show it again. Show it again” (34). This scene depicts not only the protagonist’s sadistic tendencies, but also a theme that DeLillo presents throughout his oeuvre: the influence of a continuous televised and mediated event on those who see it. Reminiscent of Lee Harvey Oswald’s televised murder, the Arthur Rapp murder tape is played “repeatedly into the night, our night, until the sensation drained out of it or everyone in the world had seen it” (34). The incessant display of the murder desensitizes viewers, and that desensitization, by extension,

makes them lose compassion for others. Packer engages in mediated responses to another murder, this time of Nikolai Kaganovich, a Russian man “of swaggering wealth and shady reputation” (81). He and Eric were friends, and although they respected each other, Eric “was glad to see the man dead in the mud. ... Eric felt good about it, seeing him there, unnumbered bullet wounds to the body and head” (81-82). Packer’s obvious lack of empathy grounds his ruthlessness and genuine unconcern for others. Important to note is the way in which Packer receives the news that his rivals have died. Eric learns about the murders through the television, which amplifies the distance between him and the rest of the world. He relies solely on technology for information and uses it for clout, intensifying his posthuman subjectivity.

Ironically, though, technology also subverts Eric’s power. Throughout *Cosmopolis*, Eric’s visions of the future come from technology. These prophetic moments perplex Eric whenever they occur. The first time he witnesses a kind of techno-time jump, he questions the functionality of the technology: “Eric watched himself on the oval screen below the spycam, running his thumb along his chinline” as if to ensure that the relationship between the camera’s recording and the real-time action are in sync. He asks his data analyst Michael Chin, ““Why am I seeing things that haven’t happened yet?”” (DeLillo 22). Next, while Eric and Jane Melman masturbate together, Eric looks up and see “his face on the screen, eyes closed, mouth framed in a soundless little simian howl” (52). He sees himself climax before the fact. These glimpses culminate into Packer’s most profound act of foresight when he appears to witness his death. In the novel’s final chapter, Benno Levin, also known as Richard Sheets and one of Packer’s disgruntled former employees, corners the protagonist in an abandoned warehouse. Throughout this final scene, Packer sees stages of his death through the screen on his watch. First “[t]here was an image, a face on the crystal, and it was his” (204). Then, “the image on the screen was a body ...

facedown on the floor” (205). Next appears the image of the “inside of an ambulance,” and finally Eric sees a tag with “Male Z” written on it: “He knew that Male Z was the designation for the bodies of unidentified men in hospital morgues” (206).¹² The common denominator in these prophetic scenes is the technology through which Packer espies the future. Consistently, the posthuman protagonist wishes for the fastest technology in order to be more well-informed about his surroundings and the market’s movement. This need is a preventative measure: Packer is paranoid about his situation in life. Technology itself, however, trumps his power to be the most informed and in control, “displac[ing] [Packer] by the very technologies he claims to master” (Veggian 90). The displacement of his posthuman condition continues as Packer rides to the Nasdaq Center in the heart of Times Square where the anti-globalization protest occurs.

In the middle of the novel, Packer undergoes his first shift in subjectivity during which he realizes how capitalism, specifically rogue capitalism, in an age of globalization functions. For Packer it is a “shift, a break in space” (97). This realization occurs when Packer sees the self-immolating man¹³ in the middle of the anti-globalization protest. Prior to seeing the burning man, Packer believes that the protest represents “the market culture’s innovative brilliance, its ability to shape itself to its own flexible ends, absorbing everything around it” (DeLillo 99). After musing on how “[t]he protest was a form of systemic hygiene, purging and lubricating,” Packer sees “a man in flames” (99) in the middle of the city. And, then, finally, Eric recognizes that the market, the glow of the cyber-capital world, is flawed: “What did this change? Everything, he thought. Kinski had been wrong. The market was not total. It could not claim this man or assimilate his act. Not such starkness and horror. This was a thing outside its reach” (99-100).

¹² I contend that these prophetic moments suggest the fracture of Packer’s posthuman subjectivity; they represent Packer’s disengagement with time *and* his fluctuation toward a humanist subjectivity.

¹³ A motif in DeLillo’s work, the immolating man echoes Thích Quảng Đức’s famous protest in 1963. References to this event appear in *Players*, *Mao II*, *Underworld* (, and *Zero K*

This act of protest monumentally alters Eric. He is overcome with a need to understand and empathize with the protestor:

Eric wanted to imagine the man's pain, his choice, the abysmal will he'd had to summon. He tried to imagine him in bed, this morning, staring sideways at a wall, thinking his way toward the moment. Did he have to go to a store and buy a box of matches? He imagined a phone call to someone far away, a mother or a lover. (98-99)

DeLillo's repetition of the infinitive "to imagine" is central to this pivotal scene. Packer wants and tries to imagine this self-immolating man's day in an attempt to empathize; however, Packer fails to do so. He recognizes that he should empathize, but he cannot imagine how to do it, thus the main verb phrases in the first two sentences of the above passage exemplify Eric Packer's main conflict, which consists in his desire and ultimate inability to commiserate. Packer alienates himself from the world outside of the cybercapital world in which he lives; therefore, when he sees the self-immolating man, he realizes in part his ignorance of the world around him and his own isolation.

Also imperative to this transformational scene is the ironic relationship Packer has with the protestor: as one literally burns away, the other is reinvigorated with life. Unlike the deaths of Arthur Rapp and Nikolai Kaganovich, which Packer watches through television screen, this voluntary death is unmediated; that is, Packer sees it unfiltered and raw, prompting his sudden and profound change in sensibility. He finds the cameramen's obsession with the protestor particularly disconcerting. Packer observes the camera men "running to the corner, broad men in haunchy sprints, cameras bouncing on their shoulders, and they closed in tight on the burning man" (99). Here, DeLillo expertly uses a long, detailed sentence to emphasize the necessity to record and broadcast the act of resistance. I assert that seeing this allows Packer to recognize the

amorality of his own behavior when he watched his fellow global traders die. Packer and Vija Kinski's inability to understand or process the self-immolation further supports this claim. Usually "speaking ex cathedra", Vija's only interpretation of the act is that "[i]t's an appropriation'" (100). Deeming it thus suggests her desensitization; but Eric fails to reflect her sentiment. He counters Vija's acerbic analysis with facts about the protestor's method and tools used to burn himself. The two leave the topic undiscussed, after which Packer asks: "Does he have to be a Buddhist to be taken seriously? He did a serious thing. He took his life. Isn't this what you have to do to show them that you're serious?" (100). His intense tone not only suggests the beginning of his shift in subjectivity but also his realization of the callousness of his previous actions.

Packer's emotional alteration is *physically* represented by the limousine. Following the chaos of the anti-globalization protest, Packer's mobile office is transformed into a piece of protest art: "The car sat stunned. It was slathered in red-and-black spray paint. There were dozens of bruises and punctures, long burrowing scrape marks, swaths of impact and discolor. There were places where splashes of urine were preserved in pentimento stainage beneath the flourish of graffiti" (101). Thus what once symbolized the power and grandeur that cyber-capitalism and monetary globalization yielded comes to represent, instead, the true corruption and greed that rogue capitalism signifies. The artistic adulteration reveals the underside of Packer's capitalist ideology. Interestingly, after Packer re-enters his marred vehicle, Torval notifies him of a threat of the "[h]ighest order of urgency" (101), making Packer feel "defined, etched sharply" with "a burst of self-realization that heightened and clarified" (102). The anti-globalization protest and the credible threat posed to Packer lead to a vision of transcendence—a manifestation of humanist thought in Packer's posthuman worldview.

Packer shifts further toward humanism when he experiences a baptismal cleansing. Countering the flames that devour the protestor is the rain that “came washing down on the emptying breadth of Times Square ... The rain was fine. The rain was dramatically right” (106). This rain sanitizes Packer, who “stood outside his car” wondering “how long it was since he felt so good (106).” This new and improved version of Packer still enjoys the capitalist technology around him, since “the yen showed renewed strength, advancing against the dollar ... This was good. This was fine and right” (106); yet the purifying rain strips Packer of the power that he maintains through the first half of *Cosmopolis*. He is left vulnerable and threatened by the elements of the other world that surrounds him—the New York City streets. Moreover, the threats to his personal safety and financial security seem to excite and inspire him to live. He believes that “it was the threat of death at the brink of night that spoke to him most surely about some principle of fate he’d always known would come clear in time. Now he could begin the business of living” (107). The concluding phrase foreshadows Eric Packer’s ultimately failed humanistic turn, particularly in the noun “business.” Packer, in anticipation of Ross Lockhart in *Zero K*, commodifies living even after his spiritual purification, suggesting his inability to completely renounce rogue capitalism and posthumanism.

Packer’s humanistic turn following the protest and the baptismal rain comprises a search for transcendence. Nootboom claims that “[t]ranscendence does not imply that there ‘is something’ for the self beyond life, it can be part of life, though in life one can aim beyond it, to *the life of others* and to what one leaves behind after life—and that brings us closer to humanism” (4-5, my emphasis). Thus humanism and transcendence are inextricably tied together. In *Cosmopolis*, Packer, following his “transformation,” attempts to transcend by engaging in community. This relates directly to the first of four ways by which one may achieve transcendence: “as being

engaged in shifting identity” (Nooteboom 5).¹⁴ Previously, as mentioned above, Packer’s interactions with people were forced and unengaging; yet following his alteration, the protagonist begins to connect with others through art or out of an earnestness about empathizing, although the methods he chooses prove to be problematic. Following the cleansing rain, Packer and his new bodyguard, Kendra Hays, have a mid-afternoon rendezvous, during which she “wore her ZyloFlex body armor while they had sex” (111). The presumed nakedness of Packer’s body contrasts with Kendra’s overtly protected body, and throughout the scene, he wants her to endanger him. The sadomasochism escalates quickly, but Packer does not seem to mind. First, “She poured a few drops of vodka on his genitals. It stung, it burned. . . . he wanted her to do it again.” (114). The apex of the scene comes when he asks her to shoot him with a powerful stun gun—a weapon she uses to protect him. In essence, Packer requests that Kendra perform the opposite of her job. His rationale for this request originates from a place of longing—a sentiment Packer rarely shows but one that can be attributed to his search for transcendence: ““Show me what it feels like. I’m looking for more. Show me something I don’t know”” (115). Through this shot, Packer believes he can learn more about what it means to be human—to learn how pain feels.¹⁵ The stun gun makes Packer “deprived of his faculties of reason” for a short time, but after the fact, “he could think . . . well enough to understand what was happening” (115). The pain acts here as an agent for understanding and a feeling through which, I argue, he wishes for a transcendent moment. Though he recognizes after being stunned that “[h]is actions

¹⁴ The other three ways in which to transcend are “as feeling out of time; as oriented to the life of others; and as oriented towards what one leaves behind after life” (Nooteboom 5). While certainly all of these emerge in Packer’s humanistic subjectivity, for the purposes of this chapter and my argument, the first serves me best.

¹⁵ Packer analyzes pain once before when discussing sex with Jane while receiving his daily prostate exam: “The pain was local but seemed to absorb everything around it, organs, objects, street sounds, words” (50). Furthermore, Packer claims that the painful exam allows him to “think and speak of other things but only within the pain” (50). That is, Packer is rational through pain. The pain from the exam, however, differs from that of the stun gun because the former is not committed ironically. [I don’t know what you mean by “committed ironically”]

regarding the yen were causing storms of disorder” (116), he does nothing to combat his behavior, implying that his desire for transcendence through pain is false and his attempt in vain.

Through his “shifting identity,” Packer begins to notice quotidian aspects of life. He remarks that his wife smokes and that she is “wearing a cashmere sweater” (117), trying to understand her—or so it seems. During dinner with his wife in the wake of his afternoon triste with Kendra, Packer acknowledges his change. He says, “‘I’m trying to make contact in the most ordinary ways. To see and hear. To notice your mood, your clothes. This is important’” (119). Further along in the evening, in their penultimate meeting, Elise asks Packer, “‘What’s important now?’” Packer responds, “‘To be aware of what’s around me. To understand another person’s situation, another person’s feelings. To know, in short, what’s important.... But nothing that was true then is true now’” (121). Following this conversation, Packer informs Elise of the plight of his company and the U.S. dollar and the threat on his life. This emotional ploy prompts Elise to help her husband financially, using the trust fund her parents established in her name, even though she knows that her marriage will be short-lived. She says, “‘I promise I’ll help. But as a couple, as a marriage, I think we’re done, aren’t we?’” (122). Though Packer uses his humanistic attention to the quotidian to con Elise and to engage in his rogue capitalist behavior, he and his wife subsequently share their first intimate moment as “they walked to the door together, in close embrace, her head resting on his shoulder” (122).

A definitive humanist moment for Packer occurs at the funeral of his friend and favorite rapper Brutha Fez, a Sufi rap star.¹⁶ Packer reels in shock, responding in a hyper-emotional way,

¹⁶ Important to note here is the nature of the funeral. Brutha Fez’s songs play loudly as the procession passes. The raps—poems—globalize art, for they are an amalgamation of ancient Sufi music and raps in Punjabi and Urdu in the “black-swagger English of the street” (133). Moreover, Brutha Fez’s lyrics mirror Packer’s life. The final lyric heard before Packer’s emotional breakdown is, “Let me be who I was / Unrhymed fool / That’s lost but living” (138). This evokes Packer’s new “business of living.” He has regressed partly to a man whose money and power no longer define him. By this time in *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer’s money (and his wife’s money) has disappeared, leaving him stripped bare of what he was.

when he learns of Fez's death. In many ways, Fez's death embodies what Packer has tried to do the entire second half of the novel. Fez, like Packer, was immensely famous and powerful. Packer assumes that because of this, the rapper must have been murdered; however, "Fez [had] been having cardiac problems for years." He was not "a thug down some alley. He [had] never been breathalyzed, barely, since he was seventeen." Packer is "[d]isappointed" (132) that Fez was not shot. Because Brutha Fez died of natural causes, Packer, I believe, recalls his own physical ailment: his asymmetrical prostate. Therefore, Fez's death humbles Eric. This newfound humility triggers a cathartic response, reducing Packer to tears: "He began to weep as the follow-up security detail went past, a police van and several unmarked cars. He wept violently. He pummeled himself, crossing his arms and beating his fists on his chest" (139). Nevertheless, once again, in this depiction of humanism and a connection with cosmopolitan crowd of "all races and styles of belief and manner of dress" (139), Packer incorporates a posthuman element. Though "[h]e wept for Fez and everyone here and for himself" (139), Packer wishes to digitize and mediate the funeral, which blurs the lines of humanism and posthumanism that Packer embodies:

There was one thing more he wanted from this funeral. He wanted to see the hearse pass by again, the body tilted for viewing, a digital corpse, a loop, a replication. It did not seem right that the hearse had come and gone. He wanted it to reappear at intervals, proud body open to the night, to replenish the sorrow and wonder of the crowd. (139)

Packer is so ingrained in the world of technology and mediated events that even in this sympathetic moment, he returns, briefly but critically, to his posthuman subjectivity.

The final scene in which Packer displays his posthuman subjectivity is when he kills his body guard Torval after the funeral. Using a posthuman, voice controlled gun, Packer shoots

Torval: “A small white terror of disbelief flickered in Torval’s eye. He fired once and the man went down. All authority drained out of him. He looked foolish and confused” (146). This act guarantees Eric “the night for deeper confrontation” (148) and allows for “a primary method of self-expression” (Heyne 442). More than being an act by which Packer can define himself, Torval’s murder represents the peak of Packer’s posthumanity. Sciolino calls the murder “a tragic parody of intimacy in which the murderer and his victim are close together” (222). I agree with Sciolino in her interpretation of Torval and Packer’s relationship; while it is initially intimate (Torval is the closest in proximity to Packer for much of the novel), their relationship is false and not one rooted in friendship. Rather, their “paradigm is ... as employer/employee” (Sciolino 223). Thus, Torval’s murder is the final iteration of Packer’s rogue capitalist ideology—that of a solipsistic and individual self. Critical to this overtly posthuman scene is the overtly humanist occurrence afterward: once he finally reaches the barber, Packer shares his first meal—communion—as a humanist with his driver, Ibrahim Hamadou, and his barber, Anthony Adubato. This hard shift from posthumanist to humanist subjectivity—embodied in the murder and the meal—foreshadows Packer’s wavering subjectivity until he dies.¹⁷

One of the mysteries Packer endeavors to discover with his newfound humanist subjectivity is the secret of community and unfiltered connection with others. In a particular case, art couples with community, and Packer joins it to become “one of them” (176). After he leaves the barber with half of his hair cut, Packer sees “three hundred naked people sprawled in the street” (172), waiting for a film scene to be shot. When Packer strips and joins the large crowd, he displays his vulnerability physically and metaphorically. Becoming a part of this crowd, Packer struggles to

¹⁷ Interesting to note here is that following the dinner, Packer falls asleep—something he struggled to do from the beginning of the novel. Initially, Packer read literature, specifically theory, to help himself sleep, but it failed to work; now, only after relinquishing his posthumanism and engaging in the humanistic behavior of sharing a meal, Packer can rest.

join it against his posthuman impulses: “It tore his mind apart, trying to see them here and real, independent of the image on a screen in Oslo or Caracas” (176). In this communal setting, Packer also tries to see the scene through a mediated screen. He identifies that his inability to fully connect with the naked crowd “isolated him. ... He wanted to be here among them.” The crowd in this scene emphasizes Packer’s humanism, for he finally connects with the cosmopolitan crowd, which is made up of “many shades of skin color” and “the tattooed, the hairy-assed, those who stank” (176).

Ironically, this scene ends with Packer alone, which enforces the juxtaposition between the solipsistic individual and the community of the crowd. In the crowd, he meets, for the final time, his wife Elise. Following the movie shoot, the two have sex, but in a cruel, ironic twist of fate instead of distancing himself from her, she removes herself from him: “The instant he knew he loved her, she slipped down his body and out of his arms. ... and she was cool and silvery slim and walking head-high” (178). This role reversal leaves Packer yearning for the powerful posthuman realm of his limo, for “[h]e wanted to be in the rear cabin of his cork-lined limousine, in a bronzy light, alone in the flow of space, noting the lines and grains, the sweet transitions, this shape or texture modulated to do that” (179). Thus not only does Elise emasculate Packer by forcing him to undergo what she and the other women went through with him earlier in the novel, but she helps his transformation toward a humanist subjectivity. This is evidenced in Packer’s final ride in his limousine, which ends at “car lots fenced with razor wire, an area suited to his limo in its current condition” (179). The empty lot and the adulterated car seem to represent Packer himself as a desolate subject.

At the end of *Cosmopolis*, after he sees himself shot and die through the screen of his watch, Packer remembers mundane, inconsequential things about his life. In an extended passage, Eric

recalls “the hang of his cock, untransferable, and his strangely achy knee, the click in his knee when he bends it, all him, and so much else that’s not convertible to some high sublime, the technology of mind-without-end” (207-208). His initial recollections of his body—his penis and knee—depict an attempt on Packer’s part to understand his humanness, his sense of self before he dies. Though the novel concludes before it happens, Benno Levin kills the man who represents the solipsistic contemporary capitalist. But in the final moments of his life, amid the humanistic acknowledgement of quotidian resplendence, Packer imagines himself as a capitalist work of art: “He wanted the plane flown by remote control with his embalmed body aboard ... reaching maximum altitude and leveling at supersonic dash speed and then sent plunging into the sand” (209). Packer desires that his death become “a work of land art, scorched earth art ... under the auspices of his deal and executor, Didi Fancher” (209). A posthuman, rogue capitalist’s commodity, the technologically advanced “earth art”¹⁸ Packer wishes to be complicates his humanistic understanding of the prosaic, and he embraces his posthuman subjectivity once again when he yearns for the technology that provided his life with spontaneity and reinforced him with a conscious sense of self. He understands “what was missing, the predatory impulse, the sense of large excitement that drove him through his days, the sheer and feeling *need to be*” (209, my emphasis). This oscillation between posthumanist and humanist subjectivity is reflected in the novel’s ambiguous ending, which leaves Packer in a space of both death and life, “waiting for the shot to sound” (209).

As in all of DeLillo’s works, art and technology work together to depict the contemporary moment. *Cosmopolis* offers us a glimpse of the greed that rogue capitalism engenders and the social and personal ramifications that stem from an obsession with technology. In Eric Packer,

¹⁸ In *Zero K*, as we will see, the cryogenically frozen bodies of the Convergence are called earth art as well.

we recognize the shortcomings of this intense desire for immediacy in his distance and apathy; however, we also acknowledge that the counter to this is art with its ability to create community. Undeniably abounding in our world, art serves as the key to understanding ourselves and what surrounds us; while Packer does not fail to recognize his faults, it takes a devastating act of protest for him to fully realize the errors of his ways. He, however, continues to return to technology and a posthuman subjectivity until his death. Packer's wavering posthumanist and humanist subjectivity attests to the idea that he represents the twenty first century's battle between technology, capitalism, and art.

3 CAPITAL-TECHNO-ART: CONVERGENCE IN *ZERO K*

Zero K, Don DeLillo's sixteenth and latest novel, is in many ways a thematic amalgamation of all his works.¹⁹ The novel depicts Jeffery Lockhart, the narrator, coming to terms with his family's decision to undergo a mysterious and cultish cryogenic procedure called the Convergence. Jeffery's step-mother, Artis, faces a debilitating disease that will kill her, while Ross, his father, remains at the pinnacle of wealth. It is Ross' decision to be with Artis prematurely that fuels the novel's conflict, for Jeffery considers his father's choice impetuous and irrational. Reminiscent of other protagonists in DeLillo's novels, Jeffery suffers from the emotional distress of his childhood when Ross leaves his first wife, Jeffery's mother, Madeline. DeLillo's "vision is ironic, serene, [and] crackling with static like a horror film" (Rich, *The New York Review of Books*). While many—if not all—of DeLillo's fictions contain elements of horror, particularly *Point Omega* from 2010, the brooding and constrained tone of *Zero K* accentuates familiar themes expected in the author's works, including the omnipresence of technology, the endearing power of art, and capitalism's abiding grip on the American consciousness.

As discussed in Chapter I, DeLillo treats art and technology both individually and, more importantly, as a singular unit, brought together by the contemporary figure of the rogue capitalist. In *Zero K* it is Ross Lockhart who plays the role of the rogue capitalist and functions as the bridge between art and technology. In the 2016 novel, however, DeLillo heightens this connection between art and technology by blurring the lines between the two. Art and technology become interchangeable in the realm and shadow of the Convergence. Interestingly,

¹⁹ In his review of the novel for *The Guardian*, Sam Jordison discusses how *Zero K* features thematic parallels to DeLillo's other novels: "I'm open to the possibility that these parallels with earlier works are incidental. They relate to ideas that have fascinated and troubled DeLillo throughout his career and his intention may be simply to give them new iterations here, rather than to be self-referential" (*The Guardian*).

the central characters of the novel engage with art and technology to achieve a type of epiphanic vision—a new way to interpret the world or to learn a Truth, echoing Romantic ideology.²⁰ Yet no character receives a permanently changed perception of the world, for they only feel inklings of this altered insight through art and technology. In this chapter, I argue that both art and technology, as forms of human creation bound together by rogue capitalism, provide ineffective paths to transcendence; moreover, I assert that the failed achievement of transcendence criticizes contemporary capitalism and reinforces the idea that life's quotidian aspects provide the only genuine means of achieving a heightened perception of the world.

Art, as in all of DeLillo's fiction, pervades *Zero K*. Manifested in a variety of ways, art provides a way to transcendence, namely through language²¹ and literature. Jeffery Lockhart manipulates these three forms of art in search of transcendence or, as Paul Maltby calls it, a “visionary moment” (258). The protagonist manipulates language, constructing it into chants that are inextricably tied to profound and moving incidents and become an attempt to assuage the pain of an upsetting situation. Most notably and early in the novel, Jeffery narrates what seems to be the inception of his linguistic tic. Recounting the day Ross leaves his first wife, Madeline, Jeffery says,

He left when I was thirteen. I was doing my trigonometry homework when he told me. He sat across the small desk where my ever-sharpened pencils jutted from an old marmalade jar. I kept doing my homework while he spoke. I examined the formulas on the page and wrote in my notebook, over and over: *sine cosine tangent*.

²⁰ Paul Maltby, in his essay, “The Romantic Metaphysics of Don DeLillo,” shows how language in DeLillo's works reflects the ideas of Rousseau and Wordsworth, making them “characteristically ... Romantic” (264).

²¹ I consider language a form of art in this chapter because Jeffery deems it so. Listening to the Stenmark twins explain the Convergence to the benefactors, Jeffery studies syllables from the words they say. He postulates, “This was the *art* that haunts a room, the sonic *art* of monotone, or incantation, and my response to their voices...” (77, my emphasis).

Why did my father leave my mother?

Neither ever said. (14)

Jeffery's inclination to suture language to memory is typical in DeLillo's work, exemplifying the author's "tendency to seek out transcendent moments in our postmodern lives" (Maltby 261).

Here, DeLillo provides the reader with seemingly unrelated details about the protagonist's school work: "small desk", "ever-sharpened pencils", "old marmalade jar." Yet these details typify Jeffery's propensity to focus on the quotidian, which includes language, when trying to distract himself from emotional pain. Years later, at thirty-four and before his stepmother undergoes cryogenic freezing, Jeffery still struggles with the pain of his father leaving. This failed attempt at reaching some higher truth in repeating the mathematical functions reoccurs throughout the novel, as Jeffery uses names and language in an effort to gain an understanding which will lead to an epiphany. For example, when Jeffery hears Ross call Madeline a "fishwife," the son's first inclination is to find the word in the dictionary. This search leads him on an endless hunt for understanding and reason:

Coarse woman, a shrew. I had to look up *shrew*. A scold, a nag, from Old English for shrewmouse. I had to look up *shrewmouse*. The book sent me back to *shrew*, sense 1. A small insectivorous mammal. I had to look up *insectivorous*. The book said it meant feeding on insects, from Latin *insectus*, for insect, plus Latin *vora*, for vorous. I had to look up *vorous*. (25)

The parallel constructions of the definitions and the repetition of the subject-verb "I had" demonstrates the circuitous means Jeffery takes to find the definition but also his dedication and the necessity in understanding his father's insult. This provides insight into why Jeffery behaves

the way he does with language. He investigates the minutiae of the situation to understand the situation.

The next instance of “sine cosine tangent”²² also appears in a flashback, when Jeffery recalls going to a childhood friend’s home to do homework: “A half slice of withered toast slumped in a saucer still damp with spilled coffee. *Sine cosine tangent*” (56). To combat the “the smell of other people’s houses” and the strangeness of his friend, Jeffery focuses on the “*half slice of withered toast*” and the math work. The usage of adjectives again places emphasis on the quotidian aspects of the situation. Not at all uncommon in DeLillo’s oeuvre,²³ a focalization on the quotidian elements of daily life differs in *Zero K* because it serves as a distraction, for Jeffery, from the world around him and as a tool for retrospection. He recites the chants to help himself understand his situation. Jeffery portrays this idea in his final use of “sine cosine tangent” near the end of the novel when Ross has decided to join Artis as a cryogenic being: “He had walked out the door, rejecting his wife and son while the kid was doing his homework. *Sine cosine tangent*. These were the mystical words I would associate with the episode from that point on. The moment freed me of any responsibility concerning his particular numbers...” (234). Thus the reader learns why Jeffery yearns for transcendence: he fears being alone. He lost his father once and is terrified of it happening again.

In addition to repeating phrases, Jeffery uses language as a means of achieving power, similar to Eric Packer’s use of technology as a medium to display his clout; in other words, Jeffery dominates situations using language. By doing so, he “[tries] to inject meaning, make the place coherent or at least locate [himself] within the place, to confirm [his] uneasy presence”

²² One is reminded of the phrase “A zero in the system” from DeLillo’s 1988 novel *Libra*, which is repeated four times. This says expands on Oswald’s view of himself as simultaneously a loner and a miniscule piece of the “system.” (DeLillo 40, 106, 151, 357)

²³ Jacqueline Zubeck’s study of the quotidian in *The Names* (1982) informs much of my reading of *Zero K*.

(DeLillo 10). Though he suggests that he does this in “any new environment,” Jeffery utilizes language as an instrument of power when he meets people, too. For example, when he sees a woman in the halls of the Convergence, he wishes to “name her like a color, or examine her for signs of something, clues to something” (23). This search for meaning by assigning people names, or “product labels” as he refers to them early in the novel, has “metaphysical implications” and expresses “a formidable power” (Maltby 261). Furthermore, Maltby suggests that names themselves hold a transcendent, visionary power: “DeLillo wants to remind us that names are often invested with a significance that exceeds their immediate, practical function. Names are enchanted; they enable insight and revelation” (262). The enchanted power of names is best revealed when Jeffery names the Stenmark twins, reacting to the moment when the “[t]wo men entered the room, tall and fair-skinned, twins, in old work pants and matching gray T-shirts.” (DeLillo 68-69). As the twins explain the eschatological background of the Convergence project, the narrator initially struggles to categorize them based on career: “They weren’t scientists or social theorists. What were they? They were adventurers of a kind that I could not quite identify” (71). In naming—overpowering—the Stenmark twins, the men “responsible for the look and touch and temperament of the entire complex [the Convergence],” Jeffery disarms them, suggesting one of the narrator’s many fears: death (73).²⁴ Naming them distracts Jeffery from their motives in explaining the cryogenic project. His tactic fails, however; ironically, Jeffery hears and understands more about the project than he wishes. He learns that the Convergence and the “elements that [he] found so eerie and disembodied” are “All Stenmark” (73). In branding the otherwise bland name of Convergence, Jeffery also learns a startling truth

²⁴ Jeffery Lockhart’s attempts to subvert his fear of death mirror that of Jack Gladney in *White Noise*, in which Jack interrupts his narrative with brand names. For example, when fellow academic Murry J. Siskand calls Jack out on not actually taking care of his body, which could advance his rate toward death, three brand names appear suddenly as dialogue into the narrative: “‘Tegrin, Denorex, Selsun Blue’” (289).

about the cryogenics project and “the cryogenic dead, upright in their capsules. *This was art in itself*, nowhere else but here” (74, my emphasis). The narrator discovers what Nathaniel Rich claims in his review of *Zero K*: “The Convergence is not merely a laboratory, after all. It is also a conceptual art project” (*The New York Review of Books*).

Moreover, it is in this “conceptual art project” that Artis Martineau searches for an epiphany, thus conjoining the transcendence that art delivers and the transcendence that the technology of the Convergence guarantees. Jeffery’s dying stepmother pursues a “simply re-suppressed” (46) transcendence by the means of the cryogenics project designed for the “preservation of the body until the year, the decade, the day when it might safely be permitted to reawaken” (9). Artis’ desire for transcendence stems from a momentary, heightened level of perception which she gained after eye surgery. The sharpened vision leaves the archeologist in a state of awe: ““What was I seeing? I was seeing what is always there. The bed, the windows, the walls, the floor. But the brightness of it, the radiance. . . . the rich color, the depths of color, something from within. Never before, ever.”” (44-45). This epiphany grants Artis the ability to see the quotidian aspects of the world (here, the bed, windows, walls, and floor) in a new way—witnessing ““the reality we haven’t learned to see”” (46); furthermore, the sick, bed-ridden stepmother believes that engaging in the Convergence procedure will give her this elevated, visionary perception again: ““I have every belief that I will reawaken to a new perception of the world.”” (47) Yet, the new way in which to see the world disappears, and Artis is left craving it again. Jeffery acknowledges Artis’ desire for “epiphanic” vision, saying, “This was transcendence, the promise of lyric intensity outside the measure of normal experience” (47-48). Though his article does not analyze *Zero K*, Paul Maltby’s ideas adhere well to the novel. Artis’ post-operation and subsequent desire for transcendence can be explained as “the visionary

moment [that] could be exposed as a literary convention, that is, a concept that owes more to the practice of organizing narratives around a sudden illumination” (Maltby 258). And while these visionary moments abound in DeLillo’s fiction,²⁵ the ones in *Zero K* are particularly interesting because the author juxtaposes them with each other; that is, while Artis’ vision signifies transcendence in a traditional manner through technology, Jeffery’s search for transcendence comes from language, which he, as stated before, treats as an art through repetition in a chanting manner²⁶.

Furthermore, Artis’ desire to “enter cryonic suspension” (8) reflects posthuman theory efficiently. Rossi Braidotti states that “[b]ecoming-posthuman consequently is a process of redefining one’s sense of attachment and concentration to a shared world...”, and that it “enacts the transformation of one’s *sensorial and perceptual* co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self” (193, my emphasis). Posthumanism helps define our relation to the world and how we relate in conjunction with other entities. Artis Martineau depicts these ideas in the novel’s interlude. Simply titled “Artis Martineau” and written in short, schizophrenic paragraphs, this section of *Zero K* represents Artis’ interior monologue inside the “clear [casing], in a body [pod]” (140) while cryogenically frozen. Artis interrogates her existence through musing about language and her knowledge of words, and through those words, she attempts to form an identity: “I only hear what is me. I am made of words” (158). Throughout the chapter, Artis “is *first person and third person with no*

²⁵ Perhaps the most famous example in DeLillo’s work is the famous dream scene in *White Noise* during which Jack Gladney’s sleeping daughter Steffie mutters “*Toyota Celica*”—a moment that amazes Jack. He says, “The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky” (155.).

²⁶ An instance of this appears in *Underworld* with the repetition of “Everything is connected” (289, 826).

way to join them together” (160, my emphasis), making the chapter’s tone one of both confusion and frustration:

Is this the nightmare of self drawn so tight that she is trapped forever.

I try to know who I am. (161, DeLillo’s emphasis)

Depicted here is a liminal space²⁷—not only is Artis in a state of mind between life and death, but she is also between ignorance and truth. She waits for an understanding, for a coherent first-person sense of self, marked by “an awareness of his self – to recognize himself what he is – or self-consciousness is treated as a sign of being human” (Nayar 5). Represented in her questioning and confusion, Artis fundamentally lacks this human characteristic once she is cryogenically frozen.

Additionally, Artis has lost the features of a human: “rationality, authority, autonomy, and agency” (Nayar 5), making her a wholly posthuman subject—one that is just a “[w]oman’s body in a pod” (DeLillo 162). The conclusion of the “Artis Martineau” interlude, this line settles the debate Artis has with herself: she reduces herself to only a woman, virtually stripped of her identity. In a sense, Artis could be seen as a human because she typifies an idea at the heart of humanist ideology: Descartes’ idea of *cogito ergo sum*, or “I think; therefore, I am.” In her ability to think, or be rational, Artis reiterates her sense of self. The paradoxical nature of Artis as a posthuman and human subject represents the tension that permeates *Zero K*, creating a consistent struggle between rationality and irrationality. Neil Badmington states, “Reason not only grants the subject the power of judgement; it also helps ‘us’ to tell the difference between human and the non-human” (3). Essentially, then, Badmington summarizes Descartes’ idea by positing that our ability to think rationally defines us as human.

²⁷ Prior to this, Artis suggest that the Convergence is liminal. She says, ““This place, all of it, seems transitional to me”” (50).

The notion, however, of Artis as a human—with a humanist sensibility— after undergoing the Convergence procedure fails because she never recognizes who she is. The chapter concludes with questions—written as statements—that exemplify this: “But am I who I was” (DeLillo 162). The transformation of interrogatives into declaratives here creates tension and ambiguity regarding how Artis considers her self, which, in turn, forces the reader to question the character’s subjectivity. The inversion of declarative and interrogative sentences reinforces, also, the uncertainty of the Convergence and its results. We never learn what the Convergence project does for the subject who undergoes cryogenic freezing, for we only know what the project demands and promises. Does it fulfil its promise of transcendence and escape? I believe that Artis Martineau’s interlude exhibits the idea of the project’s vagueness. Furthermore, the language and construction of the chapter can be theorized in relation to the posthuman (and poststructuralist) idea of the end of humanism. Badmington claims, “Precisely because Western philosophy is steeped in humanist assumptions, [Derrida] observed, the end of Man is bound to be written in the language of Man” (9). Essentially, Badmington suggests that because it is founded on humanist discourse, Western humanity’s end must be predicated on the same language that constructs it. Also, the Derridean idea Badmington adopts coincides with an overarching theme of this thesis—that humanism and posthumanism work together. Badmington postulates exactly this: “Humanism never manages to constitute itself; it forever rewrites itself as posthumanism. This movement is always happening: humanism cannot escape its ‘post-’ (9). The schizophrenic, *deconstructed* language of the interlude exemplifies this. The disjointed and obscure language, with its fusion of first and third person and disavowal of punctuation rules, models an end of rational thought and written language, thus enforcing Artis’ posthuman subjectivity while being humanist in its deconstructed language. Exceeding the limits of

humanism and passing into posthumanism is the goal of the Convergence. The Stenmark twins say, ““We want to stretch the boundaries of what it means to be human—stretch and surpass. We want to do whatever we are capable of doing in order to alter human thought and bend the energies of civilization” (71). The contortion of humanity and humans reduces those who are cryogenically frozen to mere subjects for the scientists/social theorists “to study, [to be] toys for [them] to play with” (72). And at the center of this surpassed version of human is a new language:

A language isolate, beyond all affiliation with other languages,” [Ben Ezra] said. ...

A system that will offer new meanings, entire new levels of perception.

It will expand our reality, deepen the reach of our intellect. (130)

I postulate that the profound perception the posthuman language of the Convergence echoes is the transcendence Artis seeks. Moreover, Jeffery assumes that the language has “[n]o similes, metaphors, [or] analogies” (130), thus predicting the end of art itself. In his prediction that the posthuman language of the Convergence restricts figurative language, Jeffery divines that in the futurist world that the Convergence offers, art cannot exist. This, of course, is illogical in reality, but Jeffery believes it to be true because of the sheer influence and power of the cryogenic program. As we will see, Jeffery’s love for art—literature, painting, film—fuels, in part, his fear of the Convergence project and its possibility to destroy art in the traditional sense. Instead, the posthuman subjects of the cryogenic experiment become what Artis calls early in the novel “a form of earth art” (10). Jeffery characterizes this language as “choppy syllablelike *units*” (233, my emphasis), further underscoring the posthuman qualities of the new language. The “regular language” Jeffery speaks to control the situations around him, especially in the Convergence, he admits, is used “to subvert the dance of transcendence” (242) provided by this new technology.

An ardent lover of various forms of art, Jeffery abhors the new form of art—the cryogenic subjects who are stripped of their organs and identities. The shift from creative works such as literature and paintings to the cryogenic bodies disconcerts the narrator because he, like Eric Packer, uses art to define himself and his relationship with Ross; he states, “I liked reading books that nearly killed me, books that helped tell me who I was, the son who spites his father by reading such books” (26). Yet this self-characterization suggests that Jeffery longs for meaningful connection with his father. He remembers, “I liked sitting on our tiny concrete balcony, reading, with a fractional view of the ring of glass and steel where my father worked, amid lower Manhattan’s bridges and towers” (26). While he sits and reads outside, he keeps his father in mind and associates the “bridges and towers” of Manhattan with Ross. Interesting here is the juxtaposition between the “tiny concrete balcony” and the “glass and steel” of the “bridges and towers.” DeLillo’s comparison of the micro to the macro exhibits the disparity between Jeffery and Ross. While one sits on the lower, stone structure, the other seems to float among the clouds in skyscrapers that represent the capitalist’s prowess and wealth.²⁸ This locational dichotomy comes early in *Zero K*, and it helps to establish the tension in the Lockhart family. Therefore, through the juxtaposition of the locales in which the two main characters sit, we understand Jeffery’s grounded nature—one that relies on rationality—and Ross’ impulsive, lofty character that develops from his wealth. The tension builds once Ross insists on cryogenically freezing himself.

The technology of the cryogenics program threatens Jeffery’s passion for art. While artworks still exist, they are changed—like the humans who enjoy or will enjoy them. One of the

²⁸ The reference to the city buildings recalls Eric Packer’s building in *Cosmopolis*, which literally towers over New York City: “It was eight-nine stories, a prime number, in an undistinguished sheath of hazy bronze glass. ... It was nine hundred feet high, the tallest residential tower in the world, a commonplace oblong whose only statement was its size” (DeLillo 8).

Stenmark twins presents an obscure idea about the new relationship between technology and art. He says, simply, ““Nano-units implanted in the suitable receptors of the brain,” and then catalogs a list of works of art: “Russian novels, the films of Berman, ... Classic works of art. ... You reread the plays of Ibsen, revisit the rivers and streams of sentences in Hemingway” (72). Immediately following the art that the Stenmark brother lists, Jeffery rejects the catalog and looks at a woman in a headscarf, trying to “give her a name.” Jeffery says about her, “Her mind was empty of words, mantras, sacred syllables,” which differs from his own mind. Without words, and by extension thoughts, in her mind, Jeffery deems her as irrational. Thus in giving her a name, he reinforces for himself his rationality—his sanity. In fact, he recognizes this confirmation of his Cartesian rationality:

Here I was, in a sealed compartment, inventing names, noting accents, improvising histories and nationalities. These were shallow responses to an environment that required abandonment of such distinctions. I needed to discipline myself, be equal to the situation.

But when was I ever equal to the situation? What I needed to do was what I was doing. (72)

In giving people names, Jeffery not only pursues the transcendence that Paul Maltby discusses, but he also differentiates himself from the rest of the people in the room, including his father. He perceives himself *unequal* to the situation, for he thinks rationally, as evidenced in his ability to name and take, as Maltby puts it, “formidable power” (261). Samuel Johnson’s idea of the power and purpose of literature accords with Jeffery’s view that rationality stems from his reading of classic European texts. Johnson says, discussing the importance of virtue in works of literature, “[t]hat he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiment in

human language” (4-5). In other words, the empathy learned from “following the phantoms” of other writers bolsters rationality. By reading and learning to empathize, Jeffery thinks rationally.

Moreover, Jeffery uses art to combat his father, a symbol for the contemporary American capitalist who manages “his network of companies, agencies, funds, trusts, foundations, syndicates, communes and clans” (7).; In his now-famous 2001 article “In the ruins of the future,” DeLillo addresses capitalism, a major theme in postmodern literature, as a topic that “dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness” (*The Guardian*). Further in the article, after discussing the implications and ramifications of the September 11th terrorist attacks, DeLillo states that “[t]echnology is our fate, our truth. ... The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. ... The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think” (*The Guardian*). In *Zero K*, this “truth” is represented by the Convergence, and the capitalists who fund these “systems and networks” that help to create a new world. Ross Lockhart “a man shaped by money” (DeLillo 13), analyzes the “profit impact of natural disasters.” Jeffery characterizes his father as a stereotypical and greedy capitalist—one who has “an affair with an office temp” and is at the office for “ten or twelve hours” a day (14). Initially, Ross Lockhart is very similar to Eric Packer of *Cosmopolis*; however, as Jeffery reveals the former’s stake in the Convergence—both emotionally and monetarily— comparisons between the two characters quickly fade away.

If Eric Packer is a rogue capitalist through his “greed, social prestige, and often obscure forms of psycho-emotional gratification” (Varsava 79), then Ross Lockhart is a rogue capitalist in a different regard. That is, Ross does not obsess over money throughout the novel as Eric Packer does; instead, Ross fixates on the problem of whether or not he should join Artis in the cryogenic program of the Convergence. The preoccupation with prematurely “dying” stems from

what Eric Packer, for much of *Cosmopolis*, fails to recognize: love. Therefore, Ross functions as a rogue capitalist in that he wishes to (and eventually does) leave the consumer and intrinsic world of digital capitalism for the posthuman cryogenic suspension of the Convergence. When Ross proposes his intentions to join Artis—to be “side by side” (110)—Jeffery struggles to understand his father. He questions the possible motives for Ross’ decision, beginning with a stab at his capitalistic career:

He is going with her. It denied everything he’d ever said and done. It made a comic strip of his life, or of mine. Was this a bid for redemption, some kind of spiritual deliverance after all the acquisitions, all the wealth he’d managed for others and accumulated for himself, the master market strategist, owner of art collections and island retreats and super-midsize jets. (111)

A belittling of his father’s career, Jeffery’s mental tirade against his father reveals his harsh opinions of capitalism. So corrupt is capitalism that it requires a “spiritual deliverance similar to the purifying, baptismal deluge Eric Packer stands in following the anti-globalization protests surrounding his limousine. Ross seems to believe this as well, calling the Convergence a “more permanent version” (111) of life. Capitalism reminds Jeffery of the priorities Ross had when he left; a “subpar dad,” Ross “was occupied with moneymaking concerns for much of Jeff’s childhood” (Denuccio, *WIRED*).

Following his conjectures about Ross leaving the world of capitalism, Jeffery’s indignation at capitalism never waivers, for he recognizes that his father, and investors like him, allow for and subsidize this irrational technology. He yokes the funding of the Convergence to an amoral immortality: “Live the billionaire’s myth of immortality. ... What else was there for Ross to acquire? Give the futurists their blood money and they will make it possible for you to live

forever” (117). Jeffery’s interesting use of the verb “acquire” further indicates his opinion of his father, since it suggests here that Ross has everything he could need, except immortality. For the narrator, Ross’ decision to join his wife prematurely in the Zero K unit stems from a place of narcissism, reminding Jeffrey of Ross’ choice to leave his mother when Jeffery was a thirteen-year-old boy doing his trigonometry homework. Ultimately, after Ross decides to return to the desert setting of the Convergence, Jeffery deduces that his father wishes to freeze cryogenically because of his love for his wife—so much so that “[a]ll his [Ross’] privileges and comforts, [are] drained of meaning” (224), leaving the once powerful capitalist bereft of substance. Important to mention here is Artis’ occupation and its variance with Ross’ career. When healthy, Artis worked as an archeologist. In her study of culture and art, she “brought [Ross] down from his penthouse duplex with lush décor, sun-drenched gardens and sweeping views of atomic sunsets” and brings him to a place with “some of his art, all of his books, whatever he’d managed to learn, love and acquire” (185-186). In other words, Artis kept Ross grounded, allowing him to be “able to devote to other matters, to art, educating [himself] to the ideas and traditions and innovations” (31), and without her he lives only “to grow old” (185) alone in his city apartment until his final decision to return to the “blind buildings” (4) of the Convergence. While Ross justifies his decision to be with Artis through an expression of love, I concur with the narrator; Ross returns to the Convergence because of his capitalist ideology.

Ayn Rand characterizes capitalism as “[recognizing and protecting]” man’s “connection between his survival and use of reason” (11). These attributes of the economic ideology substantiate Ross Lockhart’s decision to fund the Convergence. The billionaire believes that cryogenic freezing ensures his survival by guaranteeing immortality, and it is the logical, rational next step for him to take in the hierarchical strata capitalism creates. As they are funded by

capitalist money, the cryogenic, posthuman subjects become commodities. Braidotti claims that “[i]n substance, advanced capitalism both invests and profits from the scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives” (59), including, in regards to *Zero K*, “the dead, or maybe dead, or whatever they were, the cryogenic dead...” (DeLillo 74). In other words, the Convergence remodels “human and non-human intelligent matter” into “a commodity for trade and profit” (Braidotti 61). The Convergence provides immortal life by the means of “applied science and applied capitalism” (O’Connell *Slate*), allowing for a “capturing of the end of the world” (DeLillo 3). Thus even time, death, and fate become commodities, stamped with brands of capitalism. Furthermore, as this project is “art in itself” (DeLillo 74), the definition of art morphs into a foreign concept that Jeffery recognizes as purely irrational. As displayed in his critique of his father and capitalism, it seems that Jeffery considers this new version of art impure and ephemeral. The traditional forms of art Jeffery appreciates completely oppose the techno-art that capitalist money taints. Artis, too, in some way perceives this when she mentions the various works of art around the Convergence facility: “The only thing that’s not ephemeral is the art. It’s not made for an audience. It’s simply made to be here. It’s here ... The painted walls, simulated doors, the movie screens in the hall” (51). Essentially, art lives for itself. No monetary transaction between a person or institution exists with this traditional form of art; however, the art that capitalism funds in the Convergence guarantees something: an escape, “embracing the prospect of ending one version of life” (Daum, *The Atlantic*) and entering another, everlasting version. For capitalists can “deal with one another only in terms of and by means of reason, *i.e.*, by means of discussion, persuasion, and *contractual* agreement, by voluntary choice of mutual benefit” (Rand 11, her emphasis). Therefore, the new art created by technology and capitalism becomes less of a means to transcendence and more of a negotiation.

Jeffery interrogates these ideas after Ross tells him of his decision to be frozen. He asks, “Were these people deranged or were they in the forefront of a new consciousness?” (20). As we have seen, however, Jeffery ultimately disavows the notion of cryogenics and transcendence through technology altogether when he finally succumbs to Ross’ desire to enter the Convergence in the latter half of the novel.

Both art and technology fail to provide transcendence in *Zero K*. Jeffery attempts to learn a greater truth from language and other forms of art. Technology only bestows momentary heightened vision, depicted in Artis’ story of her post-operation surgery. Art fails because the more Jeffery engages in a theoretical understanding of language and what constitutes meaning, the less he learns—that is, the farther he moves from the transcendence he desires. The convergence of art and technology fails to provide transcendence because of its rogue capitalist foundations. Therefore, we are prompted to wonder what indeed allows for transcendence. No transcendent moment occurs in the action of the novel until the final paragraphs. A random character—a child—receives the epiphany. As he sits on a New York City bus, Jeffery notices “a tide of light;” it is a “natural phenomenon” when the “sun’s rays align with the local street grid” (273). The boy begins to “[bounce] slightly in accord with [his] cries and they were unceasing and also exhilarating, they were prelinguistic grunts.”²⁹ These unintelligible sounds—the “howls of awe”—are “more suitable than words” for Jeffery; so much so, in fact, that Jeffery asserts, “I didn’t need heaven’s light. I had the boy’s cries of wonder” (274). The concluding moments of *Zero K* reveal the secret Jeffery and Artis and other characters search for: transcendence and awe are not found in constructed entities like art or technology. They cannot be bought and used for a

²⁹ Prelinguistic grunts appear from Micklewhite’s son in DeLillo’s 1976 novel *Great Jones Street*. The mentally handicapped child fascinates Bucky Wunderlick, a failing rockstar. Bucky transcends at the very end of the novel after he takes a drug that allows him to make similar sounds. DeLillo claims that in children’s awe “[t]here is something they know but can’t tell us. Or there is something they remember which we’ve forgotten” (DeCurtis 64).

mutual gain. Rather, transcendence is found in the quotidian—the most seemingly irrelevant every day occurrences.

DeLillo stated in an interview with Anthony DeCurtis in 1988 that much of his fiction involves the quotidian aspects of life. He said, “I would call it a sense of the importance of daily life and ordinary moments. . . . I tried to find a kind of radiance in dailiness. Sometimes this radiance can be almost frightening. Other times it can be almost holy or sacred” (63). As we have seen, this “holy or sacred” transcendence is what Artis Martineau recognizes after her restorative eye surgery. She recounts the minute details—the quotidian—that she failed to recognize before. Jacqueline Zubeck’s article on *The Names*, a novel written thirty-two years prior to *Zero K*, offers compelling insight into the way the quotidian functions in DeLillo’s works. She argues that in *The Names*, James, Owen, and Frank “privilege theory and negate prosaic particularity, thereby rejecting the embodied nature of human sensibility in the material world” (354). I argue that Jeffery does the same thing in *Zero K*: the protagonist narrator forgets to look at the miniscule, while certainly he tries to recognize the quotidian when he analyzes (or over-analyzes) a name or word. This is precisely why he fails to transcend through language, for he “denies the prosaic richness of language, its ability to give expression to human possibility and uniqueness” (Zubeck 370). In his obsession to define and name—to have a power over situations and over another person—Jeffery attenuates the natural power of language that is found in its quotidian qualities.

Jeffery Lockhart’s inability to recognize the prosaic qualities of life comes from his moral dilemma in supporting Ross and Artis’ decision to freeze themselves,³⁰ which directly opposes

³⁰ Near the end of the novel, Jeffery asserts that the technologically infused way Artis and Ross died bothers him most: “I stand forever in the shadow of Ross and Artis and it’s not their resonant lives that haunt me but their manner of dying” (266). Once again, Jeffery emphasizes, like other protagonists in DeLillo’s fiction, that a fear of death motivates him.

Del Nearing in *The Names*, whose “moral discomfort, however, is related to her prosaic quality, to her tendency to validate human particularity and uniqueness in the everyday world” (Zubeck 364). Jeffery’s moral objection to cryogenics and the Convergence project (he calls cryogenics a “metaphysical crime” (114)) impedes his discovery of the transcendence, even though Ben-Ezra instructs him to try to listen to “the world hum” (DeLillo 132). Jeffery desperately yearns for the transcendence that “the world hum” delivers: “*I tried to empty my mind and simply listen. I wanted to hear ... the oceanic sound of people living and thinking and talking, billions, everywhere, waiting for trains, marching to war, licking food off their fingers. Or simply being who they are*” (135, my emphasis). The past tense, active verbs “tried” and “wanted” indicate Jeffery’s failure at understanding the prosaic, while the repetition and the parallelism indicate the sublime insight the prosaic contains. The author himself admits that the quotidian his characters search for is “something that is *almost* there” and is a “transcendence that lies just beyond our touch” (DeCurtis 63). And ultimately, for the protagonist, such is the case: Jeffery never transcends; he only witnesses someone gain the epiphanic perception, for which he seems to settle. “I didn’t need heaven’s light,” he says. “I had the boy’s cries of wonder” (274). This concluding image represents what DeLillo states about the proximity of transcendence. Jeffery is not only physically near the amazed child, he is also close to transcendence himself. He recognizes the awe “in the intimate touch of earth and sun” (274), but he is still unable to distinguish the beauty in the prosaic for himself. Jeffery’s dependence on the boy’s “unceasing and also exhilarating” (274) cries force us to question why this child suffices as a medium to transcendence. Perhaps the boy’s innocence beckons Jeffery to be content with him, or perhaps Jeffery understands that the boy has “direct contact to the kind of natural truth that eludes us as adults” (DeCurtis 64). The ambiguity of the ending leaves more questions than answers for the

reader, and readers are to interpret the wonderment hidden in the prosaic for themselves, similar to what Jeffery Lockhart must learn.

Zero K contends with how art and technology function together in a society that runs on capitalism. The novel professes the importance of art and its function as “one of the consolation prizes we receive for having lived in a difficult and sometimes chaotic world” (DeCurtis 66). Jeffery Lockhart struggles to understand the motivation behind his father and stepmother’s decision to cryogenically freeze themselves, and he uses art, language in particular, to decode the various situations he finds himself in and to find transcendence. In fact, all the characters in *Zero K* wish to transcend the every day. Artis Martienau and Ross Lockhart believe that the capitalist-funded technology of the Convergence is the key that unlocks the door to perceptive splendor. Yet, in their impassioned desire to transcend, they fail to realize that the magnificence lies within the prosaic world they wish to leave. Artis understands this in part following her operation, but she considers technology the catalyst that grants her the vision and acknowledgment of the quotidian. With *Zero K*, DeLillo tries to teach readers what Madeline tries to teach Jeffery while she lives: “Ordinary moments make the life” (109) and are the source of wonder.

4 CONCLUSION

Don DeLillo's novels, *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*, examine contemporary American life in their depictions of how art and technology converge in a capitalist society. In particular, DeLillo decries the rogue capitalist whose solipsism and greed appropriate humanity and its creations—namely, art and technology—as a means for personal gain. The rogue capitalist figure in these two novels—Eric Packer and Ross Lockhart—bridge the divide between the two phenomena. Eric Packer does so by shifting his subjectivity from one oriented to technology and capital to one that focuses on art and empathy. Ross Lockhart connects technology and art in his treatment of them as capitalist commodities.

This thesis project poses two questions. First, why does DeLillo use the rogue capitalist to bridge art and technology in *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*? Second, using humanist and posthumanist theory, what is uncovered about how the rogue capitalist functions amid art and technology? DeLillo implements the rogue capitalist to bridge art and technology, I profess, to show the enduring power of capitalist society. Eric Packer only recognizes the error of his rogue capitalist ideology when he sees a powerful and horrifying act of protest that is treated like a work of art. This immolation spurs Packer's change in subjectivity, and it prompts him to consider the humanistic aspects of art, for it has the power to harbor community and empathy. Ross Lockhart joins art and technology much differently; by funding the Convergence project, Ross encourages the creation of a new form of art using the problematic (to his son Jeffery) technology of cryogenics.

Humanist and posthumanist theory help interrogate the actions of the characters in these novels and allow for an understanding of how art and technology work. One of the many similarities between *Zero K* and *Cosmopolis* is the theme of transcendence. A humanist idea,

transcendence suggests a higher perception. Artis attempts to find transcendence through the technology of the Convergence—a technology that she believes could mirror the heightened perception she had after an eye surgery. Jeffery, on the other hand, attempts to find it through art, specifically language. In repeating phrases like a mantra, he tries to gain a higher understanding of the situations in the Convergence lab and the relationships he has with people. Yet, no character in the novel receives an epiphany. By the end of the novel, Jeffery still struggles to understand his family's decision to undergo cryogenic freezing, and Artis' character arc concludes in a pod where she fails to recognize both herself and her sense of self. Their means to transcendence—art and technology—fail. In fact, the only character to have a transcendent experience is a child who recognizes the beauty of the sun's rays matching the local street grid. In *Cosmopolis*, transcendence is not as overt; I argue, however, that in Eric Packer's insistence on understanding how others feel physically, he searches vainly for transcendence. This explains his irrational behavior after the antiglobalization protest and his instances of sadomasochism. Packer receives his transcendence only seconds before he is killed—when he understands the importance of living in the moment and acknowledging the quotidian aspects of life. Thus in his novels, DeLillo illuminates the idea that transcendence does not lie in the created phenomena of technology and art, but rather it lies in the prosaic qualities of life—the seemingly mundane aspects that comprise our lives.

In a rare interview, DeLillo recounts the moment he saw the Manhattanhenge—the phenomenon described at the end of *Zero K*. He says, “‘And it was the most wonderful moment. This enormous glow, like nothing you’ve seen, a concentration of light in that narrow street.’ ... ‘And you know, like most things, there and gone in a flash’” (*The Guardian*). DeLillo echoes these sentiments in his novels. In recognizing the quotidian within himself before he dies, Eric

Packer finally begins to understand himself and humanity in general. And when Jeffery Lockhart hears the boy's cries of wonder as the sun matches the street grid, he recognizes that the prosaic qualities of life provide the most profound transcendence that surpasses the power of language.

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